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# Economic Development in Downtown Ossining Since 1969

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# Economic Development in Downtown Ossining Since 1969

by

Lutonya Russell-Humes

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
DYSON COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
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APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_

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## Statement of the Problem

As tax roles diminish during the current recessive economy, government, particularly local governments, are faced to discover additional sources of revenue to ensure that government can continue to function at levels acceptable to the public. However, with the various economic stimuli proposed by the federal government, municipalities are positioned to spur economic development that expands commercial and real property tax bases.

Often it is in the downtown regions of these cities and towns that this economic development is directed. Cities and towns across America began to revisit the economic potential of downtowns in the 1960s through redevelopment. (Robertson, 1997) Robertson (1995) goes further to describe the American downtown as the very fabric of a city's identity. However, despite more than thirty years of investment in downtowns, most still view them as "inconvenient, obsolete, and even dangerous." Downtowns, once vital commercial centers of cities and towns of all sizes, began to decline as Americans became more comfortable in their automobiles and took their shopping dollars to convenient suburban shopping malls and shopping centers.

An increasing number of middle-class suburbanites did not enjoy the inconvenience of travel nor did they like to mingle with the diversity of people who frequented downtown...Moreover, massive declines in transit ridership, which began in the 1950s, further eroded the customer base for downtown retailers, while at the same time the beginning of the Interstate Highway System in 1956 served to provide greater access to suburban retailing surrounded by ample free parking.

- Robertson, 1997, p. 385

In small towns, the road to economic growth and development must go through downtown. Despite the erosion of small-city downtowns, a considerable portion of the city's tax base comes from the region. (Robertson, 1999)

The determination to healthy core areas in our communities-not to let the center city die-applies with as much vigor to small towns as to the classic big city examples. For every Boston and Pittsburgh, there are hundreds of smaller cities and towns pursuing regeneration.

- Breen & Rigby, 2004, p.2

In New York State small towns and cities have seen considerable investment in their downtowns. Westchester County localities have been no exception. Over the past three decades, municipalities including White Plains, New Rochelle, Port Chester and Yonkers have embarked on expanding their tax base by making their downtowns consumer destinations. Whether it has been through bulldozing communities to build malls and upscale housing, restoring the historic buildings of the downtown region to recapture the lure of years past, or a combination of the two, communities across Westchester County have looked to their downtowns to supplement tax coffers. Given the current national stimulative policies, those towns and villages that have not aggressively sought to develop their downtowns might be poised to reap the economic benefits of investment.

At this fortunate juncture, downtown Ossining is in an enviable position to make itself into a distinctive destination in Westchester County: by building upon existing businesses including ethnic retail and singular restaurants, as well as a landscape that offers panoramic views of the Hudson palisades and an exceptional, intact historic streetscape of nineteenth century buildings.

- Village of Ossining, NY Comprehensive Plan, 2004, p. 42

The Village of Ossining, positioned on the historic Hudson River in north central Westchester, is one such municipality. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors, particularly those related to local leadership, which might impede the progress towards development of the downtown crescent. This study will review the history of

downtown Ossining, leadership in the village, and the evolution of the current development debate. Further examination will answer four questions:

1. How has Ossining approached economic development in its downtown since 1969?
2. How effective were those strategies?
3. What were the barriers to success during that period?
4. What are the implications to current development efforts?

## **Literature Review**

There is considerable literature available on economic development, and specifically, downtown development. The vast majority of that literature refers to large cities across the United States. This section will discuss “downtown” in a historical context. Further discussion will include the various strategies most often utilized in downtown development. Finally, a review of leadership in the development process will be made.

### ***Historical Context***

Robertson (1997) describes the 19<sup>th</sup> century evolution of downtown as an emerging viable retail district. There are two primary reasons for the centralization of retailing. The first was the expansion of the streetcar. Consequently, people were able to travel greater distances to shop. Secondly, the relative affluence resulting from an overall economic growth gave more people more disposable income than had been known to date. Downtowns across the country thrived as social and economic centers until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Given that most downtowns are situated where the city originated and contain many of the oldest and most recognizable buildings, they embody the heritage of a community.

For generations the downtown has served as the traditional gathering place for parades, festivals, celebrations, and other community events. (Robertson, 1999, p. 270)

With the genesis of sprawling suburbs and the advent of the automobile, retail activity became less centralized and downtowns began to decline. (Robertson, 1995) For much of the remaining century, downtowns became local economic vacuums with rampant building vacancies, crime and an overall non-welcoming atmosphere. By the 1950s, retail activity on downtown regions had declined to just 20 percent of retail sales nationally. By 1977, the rate was only 4 percent. (Robertson, 1999)

### ***Downtown Development Strategies***

Beginning in the 1960s, cities began to reinvest in their downtowns. This reinvestment was bolstered by the federal grants resulting from anti-poverty legislation of the Johnson Administration. (Mitchell, 2001) Robertson (1995) illustrates several strategies for redevelopment of downtowns throughout the country.

Pedestrianization promotes pedestrian –friendly downtowns. This can be accomplished through widening of sidewalks, pedestrian malls that block automobiles from roadways, or a myriad of traffic-controlling tactics. This strategy assumes that increased pedestrian traffic will increase retail revenue. However, Houstoun (1990) argues that while many of the pedestrian malls created in the 1960s and 1970s did increase foot traffic downtown, the goal of increased retail spending, thereby boosting the local economy, was not realized. Consequently, most of the pedestrian malls were bulldozed to make way for automobiles again.

The festival marketplace is a joint venture between government and private business developed on a historic property and “contains a mix of small unique shops, restaurants, and entertainment that are integrated into a distinctive historical setting.”

(Robertson, 1997) Most prominent of these is Boston's Faneuil Hall, Atlanta's Underground, and Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco. However, there has been limited success with this model. Sawicki (1989) explains that festival marketplaces are expensive to develop because the leasable area has a low net-to-gross ratio, and there is no department store anchor to serve as a major revenue generator, as is the case in a shopping mall. Consequently, the festival marketplaces only work in cities with a sizable tourist base and an additional major attraction for potential customers. (Robertson, 1997) Indoor shopping malls and mixed-use centers are also developments commonly found in larger cities with limited success.

However, smaller towns employ additional strategies for development. Robertson (1999) lists these as historic preservation, and waterfront development. Both are particularly successful to small towns because often the municipalities have not undergone significant demolition in the downtown area. Consequently, the original buildings remain, bringing a unique character that can be attractive to customers. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center's approach builds on these distinctive assets by employing four points: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. (Dane, 1997)

Organization entails coalition building and resource gathering. Promotion requires that the coalition develop a marketing scheme to enhance consumer confidence in downtown. Design entails improving the physical appearance of the region and the development of a design management plan. Finally, economic restructuring seeks to strengthen the current economic assets, while "expanding and diversifying the base."  
(<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/0>)

A crucial part of downtown redevelopment for those towns situated on waterways is the development of the waterfront. These projects may include a myriad of ideas, from wildlife sanctuaries to housing.



### ***Leadership in Development***

Regardless of the strategy implemented, the success of downtown development is contingent upon the cooperation of the local leadership. Leadership includes members of the political, business, civic, cultural, and real estate communities. In *Main Street Success Stories*, Dane (1997) highlights forty-four towns and cities that have implemented the Main Street approach. Their success is directly linked to the cooperation amongst government, business, community and other institutions.

Much of the literature related to leadership and development is in the context of larger cities. However, an examination of those theories provides a framework for discussion of smaller localities. Judd (2000) argues that political leadership is fundamentally defined by the political structures and traditions of the locality. He goes further to say that “downtown renewal was the one aspect of urban renewal that accorded with the ambitions of mayors and business elites.” Those structures include non-profits, ethnic and racial considerations, and neighborhood associations.

Judd and Parkinson (1990) through case studies in cities of the United States and Europe found that local leadership capacity and the type of redevelopment strategy utilized by a town are closely linked.

Divided, unstable political structures, especially when accompanied by weak public-private sector institutions, were associated in every instance with reactive policies. On the other hand, cities with united or stable political coalitions and with strong public-private collaborative institutions, had implemented aggressive, targeted policies in every instance...leadership is not static but a developmental phenomenon. Past experience matters a great deal. In cities with a history of development efforts, political battles encourage the creation of a rich institutional context. (Judd and Parkinson, 1990, p. 296)

Clingermayer and Feiock (1995) speak to the motivation of leaders in setting development policies. They argue that development policy is either redistributive or distributive. Redistributive policy provides incentives that benefit “low income residents.

While, distributive policies are targeted primarily to benefit specific geographic interests.” This contrasts Peterson’s (1981) position that development satisfies a “unitary interest” because, while the immediate benefit may be to an elite group, the policy ultimately benefits the city as a whole by generating revenue and jobs for all residents.

Urban regime theory illustrates distributive policy. Development policy has experienced a paradigm shift over the past three decades, preferring the regime approach to the previously dominant growth machine policy that favored a business-dominated approach to development. (Goetz, 1994) Through the context of Stone, the original author of urban regime theory, Mossberger and Stoker (2001) define urban regime as “coalitions based on informal networks as well as formal relationships” that possess four specific qualities:

- “partners drawn from government and nongovernmental sources, requiring but not limited to business participation;
- collaboration based on social production-the need to bring together fragmented resources for the power to accomplish tasks;
- identifiable policy agendas that can be related to the composition of the participants in the coalition;
- a longstanding pattern of cooperation rather than a temporary coalition.”

Regimes are neither stagnant nor permanent. However, the concept has clarified the power within urban settings as being “power to” rather than “power over.” (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001)

These regimes are classified into four categories contingent upon the relationship between coalitional arrangements and policy agendas: (1) a *caretaker* regime, organized around maintaining the status quo; (2) a *developmental* regime, organized around promoting economic growth and preventing economic decline; (3) a middle-class *progressive* regime, organized around imposing regulations on development for

environmental or egalitarian purposes; and (4) a lower-class *opportunity expansion* regime, organized around mobilization of resources to improve conditions in lower-income communities. (Kilburn, 2004)

The citizen participation inherent in urban regimes poses a particular quandary to political leaders as it relates to development because of their activism. However, that activism affords progressive politicians the political capital to prevail in pushing agendas forward. (Kilburn, 2004)

### ***Need for Further Research***

While there is rather extensive research related to larger cities and downtown development, as Robertson (1999) states, there is much less written from the small town perspective. Additional research would allow small suburban municipalities of 30,000 residents or less, to examine the variables related to development and the successful strategies. Specifically, given the challenges set forth in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, it would be advantageous to reveal the factors that would propel action towards the fulfillment of the objectives set forth in the plan. The findings from this study might also prove applicable to other small towns around the country. “The story of Ossining’s downtown follows a narrative similar to many of America’s Main Streets..” (The Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan, 2004)

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The questions considered in this research are: 1) How has Ossining approached economic development downtown since 1969? 2) How effective were those strategies? 3) What were the barriers to success during that period? 4) What are the implications to the current development efforts?

Previous research offers clear criteria for successful development strategies in downtowns. Success, in this study, is operationally defined as having met the objectives stated in the reviewed documents and having met the following criteria:

- a. **Organization:** Was there mobilization of a coalition; a gathering of resources? Were local leaders from all sectors, i.e. business, political, civic, cultural, and real estate, represented in the coalition?
- b. **Promotion:** Was there a clear marketing scheme outlined and employed to inform the larger community?
- c. **Design:** Were physical assets enhanced and a design management plan in place?
- d. **Economic Restructuring:** Are existing economic assets enhanced? Was the tax base expanded?
- e. **Waterfront Plan:** Was there a clear plan for the waterfront and was it in practice?

The success of development during this period is defined by the level to which the aforementioned elements were employed in the plans.

A review of development plans from the period was conducted to analyze the strategies, goals and objectives, and practices of the village leadership's approach to development in the downtown crescent. The review sought to answer the degree, if any, to which the plans were implemented, and how successful the implementation actually was.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

A review of historical data was conducted to analyze economic development in the Village of Ossining between 1969 and 2000. Several documents were available for

review, including the 1969 Comprehensive Development Plan, the 1971 Urban Renewal Plan for the Central Renewal Area, the 1975 Rehabilitation Feasibility and Historic Preservation Study of the Crescent-Main Street Area, the 1977 Waterfront Development Plan, the 1977 Village Center Planning Program Central Renewal Area, the 1991 Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, and the 1998 Downtown Ossining Vision Plan. A review of the current Comprehensive Plan was also made to offer a contemporary perspective.

An interview was conducted with the current Village Planner, Valerie Monastra, AICP. Additionally, briefings prepared by Ms. Monastra for the Downtown Development Fund Committee were reviewed. An interview was scheduled with a former member of the Village Board, but was canceled due to a conflict with his schedule. Attempts to contact other previous board members from the research period were futile, as many have since moved from the area or are deceased. Attachment 1 outlines the questions asked during the interview. The interview's purpose was to: 1) Allow the researcher to get a fuller understanding of the historical context of the documents. There are several people still involved in the community who participated in the development of several of these plans to be reviewed and they can offer perspective that may not be clear in the plans themselves. 2) Fill in gaps of information not clear in the documents themselves.

Finally, the current comprehensive plan was analyzed in context of the criteria previously noted. The chances of success were examined in terms of the current plan's comparison to previous efforts and its alignment with the stated criteria.

### ***Research Type***

This research is applied research because it answers a set of practical questions that have policy implications. This case study provides useful information that can be used as Village of Ossining officials develop plans to implement development in the downtown crescent. The purpose is to closely examine the factors that might hinder economic development in the downtown region. This case study, as is typical of all studies, has high internal validity and low external validity. However, it does provide an in-depth analysis of economic development.

### ***Limitations***

The case study is inherently limited in external validity. There was no random selection of participants. Furthermore, this case study was limited to one subject, limiting comparative analysis of the research questions.

It was also important to complete the research within the confines of a short semester. Consequently, several of the interviews hoped to be completed could not be scheduled. The researcher was unable to locate previous government officials and business owners within the time constraint. Additionally, this time constraint hindered the researcher's ability to fully examine all of the documents from the research period. As a result, only relevant sections of six of the eleven documents are referenced in this report.

### ***Significance***

As the Ossining Village administration seeks to maintain services without raising taxes, they look to expand the tax base through economic development. Given the limitations of open space, this development would be concentrated in the downtown crescent and waterfront areas. This research can provide Village leadership with data that

would be beneficial as they plan to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and meet its goal of new revenue dollars. I also hope to elucidate the challenges that may be faced in building the coalition needed to ensure success. The Pace University Public Administration program will benefit from this research because the results may offer an additional theoretical framework useful in Regional Planning coursework.

## **Findings**

The Village of Ossining has actively sought to expand its economic activity in the downtown crescent for several decades. Numerous plans and surveys were designed to address the concern between 1969 and 2000. There were eleven reports, plans, or studies generated during the period. This project examines six of those: Comprehensive Plan for the Village of Ossining, 1969, a plan for the Village based on the construction of the state-funded Hudson Expressway; the Urban Renewal Plan for the Central Renewal Area, 1971, an urban renewal plan for the downtown crescent and surrounding areas; Rehabilitation Feasibility and Historic Preservation Study of the Crescent-Main Street Area, 1975 a study completed for the Urban Renewal Office to determine viable means to revitalize the downtown and preserve the historic character of the area; Village Center Planning Program Central Renewal Area, 1977, a report completed to present the status and results of preparation for the development planned in the downtown area; A Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, 1991, a plan for the revitalization of the waterfront ; and A Main Street and Waterfront Plan, 1994, a plan further clarifying the development goals and objectives set forth in the LWRP.

The Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan, 2007 and its Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement were reviewed as well to provide current development context and relevance.

### **Tables**

Table 1 outlines the criteria used to measure the success of the development plan as determined by the literature. Table 2 illustrates how each plan incorporated the five elements associated with successful downtown economic development. Table 3 outlines the recommendations and implementation of the respective plans.

**Table 1: Criteria for Successful Downtown Development**

Element	Definition
Organization	A coalition of local leaders in government, business, real estate, civic organizations, and other community leaders were active in the development of the plan.
Promotion	There was a clear scheme to publicize the plan with the community at-large for their buy-in.
Design	The physical assets are enhanced and a design plan is in place.
Economic Restructuring	The plan enhances current economic assets while the base is diversified.
Waterfront Plan	There is a clear plan for the waterfront is implemented.

**Table 2: Use of Economic Development Criteria by Ossining Plans 1969-1994**

Name of Plan	Organization	Promotion	Design	Economic Restructuring	Waterfront Plan
Comprehensive Plan, 1969 (Never adopted)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Urban Renewal Plan for the Central Renewal Area, 1971	No	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rehabilitation Feasibility and Historic Preservation Study, 1975	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Village Center Planning Program Central Renewal Area, 1977	No	Yes (limited)	Yes	Yes	No
A Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, 1991	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
A Main Street and Waterfront Plan, 1994	No	Yes (limited)	Yes	Yes (not fully implemented)	Yes
Comprehensive Plan, 2007 (adopted 2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (not fully implemented)	Yes (not implemented)



**Table 3: Ossining Plans' Recommendations and Implementation 1969-1994**

Name of Plan	Objectives/Recommendations	Implemented
Comprehensive Plan, 1969	Plan was never adopted	Plan was never adopted
Urban Renewal Plan for the Central Renewal Area, 1971	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rehabilitation of designated buildings</li> <li>2. Acquisition and clearance of designated property for private development</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No (Clearance and acquisition was made, but no private development followed)</li> </ol>
Rehabilitation Feasibility and Historic Preservation Study, 1975	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop housing within walking distance to the Crescent</li> <li>2. Centralized and concentrated commercial facilities</li> <li>3. Utilize existing buildings</li> <li>4. Maintain established use patterns</li> <li>5. Promote noticeable change</li> <li>6. Realize full potential of site</li> <li>7. Provide adequate parking</li> <li>8. Maintain attractive land features</li> <li>9. Coordinate with adjacent developments</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes (Since 2000)</li> <li>2. No</li> <li>3. Yes</li> <li>4. Yes</li> <li>5. No</li> <li>6. No</li> <li>7. Yes</li> <li>8. No</li> <li>9. No</li> </ol>
Village Center Planning Program Central Renewal Area, 1977	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop acquired land for parking</li> <li>2. Rehabilitate structures in the upper Crescent to preserve historic character</li> <li>3. Use rehabilitated space for office and retail space</li> <li>4. Create marketing theme</li> <li>5. Coordinate pedestrian system for accessibility</li> <li>6. Include residential units in new developments</li> <li>7. Maintain development of scale</li> <li>8. Disperse parking lots to rear of buildings when possible</li> <li>9. Widening of Main St.</li> <li>10. Create North and South route on all of Spring Street</li> <li>11. Create a Waller Ave. Extension</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No</li> <li>2. Yes</li> <li>3. Yes</li> <li>4. No</li> <li>5. Yes</li> <li>6. Yes (Since 2000)</li> <li>7. Yes</li> <li>8. No</li> <li>9. Yes</li> <li>10. No</li> <li>11. No</li> </ol>
A Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, 1991	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creation of new Market Square</li> <li>2. Sidewalk Improvements</li> <li>3. Pedestrian Links with Crescent parking</li> <li>4. Maintenance of sidewalks</li> <li>5. Convert Spring St. to two-way traffic flow</li> <li>6. Upgrade existing parking lots</li> <li>7. Security improvements</li> <li>8. Appoint a historic Review Commission for Historic District</li> <li>9. Develop Historic District Design Guidelines</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes (limited)</li> <li>2. Yes</li> <li>3. Yes</li> <li>4. Yes</li> <li>5. No</li> <li>6. Yes</li> <li>7. No</li> <li>8. Yes</li> <li>9. Yes</li> </ol>
A Main Street and Waterfront Plan, 1994	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focused, high value-added core restaurants</li> <li>2. Convenience-oriented retail</li> <li>3. Concentrated mix of housing, private and government offices, and service businesses</li> <li>4. Business recruitment and retention program</li> <li>5. Rezone to accommodate varied housing and retail in the Crescent</li> <li>6. Pursue regional tourism initiatives under the Joint Urban Cultural Park and Greenway Programs</li> <li>7. Incorporate the arts in development</li> <li>8. Improve intersection of Main, Spring and Brandreth</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No</li> <li>2. Yes (limited)</li> <li>3. No</li> <li>4. No</li> <li>5. Yes (2009)</li> <li>6. No</li> <li>7. No</li> <li>8. Yes</li> </ol>

	9. Indefinitely postpone plans for parking structure behind Post Office building	9. Yes
	10. Village should not acquire vacant lot on Highland Ave.	10. Yes
	11. Eliminate brick tree planters and provide benches	11. Yes
	12. Mask frontage portions of Main St. parking lots	12. No
	13. Sidewalk enhancements	13. Yes
	14. Substitute other figure for gazebo near proposed market square	14. Yes
	15. Create Downtown Management Organization such as National Main St. Program	15. No.
	16. Support retail events	16. No
	17. Target the Ossining National bank building and the old Opera House as high priority projects	17. Yes (partially 2009)

## Interview

The Village Planner was asked the following questions (*Responses are in italics.*):

- When did you begin as the Village Planner? *In 2005.*
- Who were the people involved in developing the plans put forth from 1969 to 2000? *The respective Village Boards started the plans. The earliest plans, the Comprehensive Plan of 1969 and the Urban Renewal Plan, were completed by consultants only. The subsequent plans had limited community involvement. There was no planning department until 2005, although a planner was hired in the early 1990s, when he left in the mid-1990s, the position remained vacant until she filled it.*
- Was there a marketing plan to promote community buy-in? What was it? Who was responsible for implementing the plan? Was it implemented? *The Village Manager's office was responsible for promoting the plans. However, as Village administration changed with each two-year election cycle, the focus and priorities changed. Everything was completely dependent on the political regime at the time. None of the plans were seen as necessities, and none were really implemented. Only the Urban Renewal Plan was relatively implemented, but there*

*was no follow through after demolition. The Local Waterfront Renewal Plan (LWRP) did include community input and was implemented. The current Comprehensive Plan was community driven and removed from the political process.*

- *Were there any challenges to those plans? How was it implemented? The Village Administration would buy into a number of initiatives without evaluating the actual long-term results and sustainability.*
- *What was the role of the waterfront? What happened to the Hudson Expressway referenced in the 1969 Comprehensive Plan? The state initiated the highway and retracted it. Consequently the plan was never adopted. The LWRP sought to decrease industrialization on the waterfront because the public wanted to recapture the river. This resulted in the today's zoning laws. It is now zoned for light manufacturing. Crawbuckie [a preserve on the waterfront] became dedicated parkland. It took 30 years to decide to make trails and use the land.*
- *The LWRP recommends a Market Square Management Council. Is there one in place? Did it develop the rules and guidelines as suggested? If not, who oversees the events planning there? No. No. The Village Board assumes that duty.*
- *Are there tax incentives for façade improvements, as recommended by the LWRP? No and that is a tricky one. There are tax breaks from the Federal government if it is a National Registered building but there are a lot of strings attached and people do not like using those tax credits. There are no state tax credits but local government can put them in place but our tax revenue is as such that the Village does not have that luxury or property taxes would have to rise greater than they already do.*

- Is there a Village motto as recommended? *No.*
- Is there a Waterfront Advisory Committee as suggested? *Yes. The EAC (Environmental Advisory Council) was designated the Waterfront Advisory Committee.*

### **Current Plans**

The Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan, 2007 has six objectives related to the downtown crescent.

- Objective 1) Promote Ossining as a desirable place to do business, focusing on regulatory reform and capacity building.
- Objective 2) Create a unique dining and shopping destination to attract residents and visitors, both during the day and at night.
- Objective 3) Promote and enhance downtown amenities and character.
- Objective 4) Address perceived and actual parking problems.
- Objective 5) Promote economic development outside of the Crescent area.
- Objective 6) Update existing business district zoning by creating new zones.

## **Analysis of Findings**

### ***The Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan, 1969***

In 1968 New York State proposed the Hudson Expressway to run parallel the Hudson River near the commuter railway on the waterfront. Because it would allow greater accessibility into the village, the Village of Ossining leadership saw this as an opportunity to address the declining downtown and stimulate growth in the area.

Planning consultants drafted a plan centered on the roadway's development. The Comprehensive Plan, 1969, was the first planning framework since the adoption of the

Village of Ossining Master Plan, 1959. The plan was contingent upon two major capital projects: the Hudson Expressway and Urban Renewal. (Raymond, et. al, 1969) Both required considerable intergovernmental revenue and coordination. As previously stated, the Hudson Expressway was completely dependent upon state dollars and orchestration. The Urban Renewal Program, first promulgated by the Housing Act of 1949, would require significant funding from the federal government.

([http://www.hud.gov/utilities/print/print2.cfm?page=80\\$^@http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ehud%2Egov%2Foffices%2Fadm%2Fabout%2Fadmguide%2Fhistory%2Ecfm&portnum=80](http://www.hud.gov/utilities/print/print2.cfm?page=80$^@http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ehud%2Egov%2Foffices%2Fadm%2Fabout%2Fadmguide%2Fhistory%2Ecfm&portnum=80)) The 1969 plan could not have been implemented without the success of these two projects. However, the Village neither had the funds, nor the jurisdiction in the case of the completion of the expressway, to ensure the completion of these projects. The plan was crafted by the consultants, with the input of the Planning Board and Village Board. There was no community influence. Nonetheless, the authors did strongly encouraged community meeting and a marketing scheme to solicit community support and buy-in. There was no real means of incorporating the architectural design of the historic buildings in the downtown crescent. Rather, the plan sought to "...create a superior urban environment" through the "complete orientation of commercial facilities." (Raymond, et. al., 1969) However, when the state of New York pulled out of the Expressway, the Village Board failed to adopt the plan. With such a limited focus and dependency, none of the recommendations were realized.

### ***Urban Renewal Plan for the Central Renewal Area Neighborhood Development Program, 1971***

Two years later, the Village Board, under the leadership of a new mayor, commissioned the same consultants to develop the Urban Renewal Plan. Again, there was

no community involvement in the development of the plan. The plan was anchored in the acquisition and demolition premise of the national urban renewal program. While it acknowledged the value of the preserving historical buildings, the plan resulted in the demolition of two blocks of Main Street on one side of the street. The intent was to build mixed-use developments that would include housing, retail space, and office space. Development of new properties was to be completed by private firms. However, there was no development on the site until the United States Post Office moved to the southwest corner in 2000. The rest of the demolished area was converted to parking lots and the current Market Square. However, the primary objective of developing new properties that would be conducive to retail and housing was not fully realized in the downtown region. Again, Ossining's objectives were dictated by the agendas of other levels of government and the funding streams available, rather than the needs and preferences of the community.

### ***Rehabilitation Feasibility and Historic Preservation Study, 1975***

The study, commissioned by the local urban renewal office, was “directed towards proper planning concepts, which can be implemented over a period of years, and not to the production of a one-shot development package...to point the way.” Evidence from the study continued to support the development of housing in the demolished sites on the south side of Main Street. Much of the literature supports the argument that success in downtowns is contingent upon the available resident clientele with disposable income that would be spent in the downtown area. However, there has been no residential development on the site to date.

There was considerable public input through a forum at the onset of the project. While this was the first instance of the coalition that Mossberger and Stoker (2001)

described in their definition of urban regime theory with community members, merchants land owners, bankers, and residents represented. However, it was not sustained.

### ***Village Center Planning Program Central Renewal Area, 1977***

Intended to be the further the Urban Renewal Plan's objective, the Village Center Plan acknowledges that the previous plans failed to reach their new development targets as a result of fewer federal dollars and the dependence on state agencies. The plan did include preservation of the historic features of the downtown crescent, as well as, encouraged development of scale, rather than the larger structures encouraged in the previous development plans. It was projected that there would be significant enough expansion of the tax base, that by 1978 the town and school tax rates would significantly decrease.

Again, the Village was under new leadership and there was little involvement from the community. There was no real outreach to the public to generate support. Consequently, there was no community investment in its success.

### ***A Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, 1991***

The only predecessor to the current comprehensive plan to fully incorporate all of the elements described by Dane (1997) in her case studies of successful downtown revitalization plans. The LWRP was primarily the result of a coalition of the community members from various sectors working together to develop a long-term plan for the under-utilized waterfront. Rather than provide a single recommendation for a particular development, the LWRP provided a framework for continuous planning on the waterfront and the downtown crescent. Preservation of historical designs was paramount in the plan. Specific detail was paid to the landscaping and aesthetics. There was a detailed plan for

marketing the program, as well as downtown itself. This was also the first plan to focus on what the Village could provide with or without intergovernmental aid. The plan was ultimately adopted by the Village administration, with several of the recommendations realized and incorporated in the current comprehensive plan.

### ***A Main Street and Waterfront Plan, 1994***

Under a new Village administration, the Main Street and Waterfront Plan provided specific details related to zoning, downtown management, and long-term planning. The plan was an enhancement to the LWRP, 1991. It utilized a comprehensive approach and made recommendations that were aligned with regional development plans. It was also the first plan to reference the burgeoning restaurant cluster as a foundation for additional businesses.

Previous research emphasizes the importance of leadership in the revitalization of downtowns. One of the major obstacles to Ossining's implementation of its development plans was the frequent change in the Village administration during the review period. From 1969 until 2000 there were sixteen elections for mayor and village board members, resulting in fifteen changes in the administration. This lack of continuity and stability resulted in the reactive strategies that Judd and Parkinson (1990) described. Rather than looking at the economic and development needs of Ossining as a community and pursuing plan from that perspective, the Village developed plans around the initiatives of the day, i.e. urban renewal, the Hudson Expressway. Additionally, when the community was included in the process, they were either limited to planning and zoning board members, or their recommendations were not fully realized, if realized at all.

During the 1990s, there was a consistent Village Board that began to emphasize development in the downtown crescent. Public input was incorporated and some actions



and proposed developments were pursued. These processes were delayed in some instances to accommodate that public involvement. However, the community buy-in that resulted from that voice allowed many of the previous recommendations to finally go forward. Coalitions, both formal and informal, were developed that reflected the community as a whole. This provided the basis for the Comprehensive Plan, 2007, which was adopted in 2009. The plan built on the initial successes of the Local Waterfront Redevelopment Plan, 1991, and the Main Street and waterfront Plan, 1994. Elements of urban regime theory are inherently present in the 2007 plan. From the initial surveys distributed to every Ossining household, to the four open community workshops that discussed the survey results, community members were given a voice at every stage of the plans development. The subsequent committees that developed from those workshops brought together partners from all segments of the population. The committees devoted two years reviewing data and existing research to develop the Comprehensive Plan. Coupled with a relatively stable administration, and the formation of a formal Planning Department, Ossining was finally able to de-politicize downtown development and take a long-term approach.

## **Conclusions**

As the Village seeks to begin implementing the strategies from the Comprehensive Plan, 2007, there are several approaches that should be employed.

1. Employ the recommended Downtown Manager to develop and implement a recruitment and retention plan for moderate and small-size businesses in the crescent and waterfront.
2. Proceed with the residential projects already initiated in the area.

3. Formalize an advisory committee that represents the population in the region including residents, business owners, non-profit managers, and landlords that would continue the collaborative efforts initiated during the Comprehensive Plan development.
4. Develop a comprehensive marketing plan and strategy that highlights the unique qualities of Ossining.

Many of these recommendations have been made to the Village administration by this author and her colleagues on the Downtown Development Committee. Employing these strategies would allow Ossining to capitalize on the work completed over the last forty-years and finally see the economic potential that its historic character and diverse population affords.

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## Appendix: Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan, 2007, Brochure

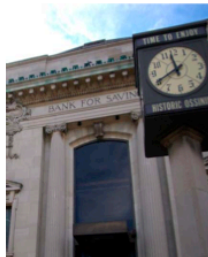
### Will there be more opportunities to comment?

A: YES!

The SEQRA (State Environmental Quality Review Act) process has commenced and a Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) is being prepared. The Village Board will publish a notice of completion of the DGEIS and makes copies available to the public. There will then be a **public comment period** for the DGEIS of 30 days and at least one **public hearing**. Once all comments are received, a **Final GEIS** will be prepared and any modifications to the amended DRAFT Comprehensive Plan will be made. There will then be an **additional public comment period** before the Village Board makes a decision to adopt or not adopt the Comprehensive Plan.

Comments or questions, please contact:  
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### Village of Ossining Comprehensive Plan:



#### An Informational Brochure

Spring 2008

### What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A: A Comprehensive Plan is a document that provides a vision for the future growth of the Village. The Village of Ossining's Draft Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for land-use and zoning decisions as well as for broader reaching objectives for transportation, housing, office, recreation, urban design, and public amenities. Lastly, the Comprehensive Plan is a consensus building tool, bringing together the development goals of residents, public officials, and key stakeholders.

### Why is Ossining writing a Comprehensive Plan?

A: Though Ossining has periodically updated its zoning code over the years, a comprehensive plan for its development has not been prepared since 1959. There have been other planning initiatives throughout the years. However, in view of the market, real estate and demographic changes of the past decade, Village leaders decided that the preparation of a comprehensive plan should at last be undertaken.

### Who prepared the Draft Comprehensive Plan?

A: The DRAFT Comprehensive Plan was prepared by the **Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee** ("the Committee") which was comprised of representatives from a wide range of Ossining residents and stakeholders. In 2006, the Village Board of Trustees selected **Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates, Inc. (PPSA)** to serve as the comprehensive plan consultants who worked with the Committee, public officials, and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Plan.

### How was the public involved?

A: Public input was welcomed throughout the process of writing the DRAFT Comprehensive Plan and was incorporated into the Plan's recommendations.



#### COMMUNITY SURVEY

In May 2006, the Village of Ossining Planning Department mailed Community Surveys to 11,500 residents of the Village (in English and Spanish). Many questions afforded opportunities to respond and comment, with an additional unrestricted comment page. Of the 11,500 surveys mailed, 1,436 were returned accounting for an excellent response rate of nearly 13 percent. Of those 1,436 surveys, more than half of the people took time to fill out the "Additional Comments."

#### S.W.O.T. ANALYSES

In fall 2006, PPSA and the Committee conducted a S.W.O.T. analysis with the community where participants were asked to identify Ossining's strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities, threats and ideas for the future. The results of both analyses revealed that four major topic areas were of utmost importance to the Village:

- Waterfront and downtown economic development;
- Traffic and infrastructure;
- Affordable housing; and
- Neighborhood quality of life.

#### COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Over the course of the winter 2007, PPSA conducted a public workshop on each of the four topics. The workshops were publicized in local newspapers, distributed in the backpack flyer program at schools, posted on the Village website, and placed on the Village message board on Route 9. The public was invited to review major issues associated with each topic and to discuss proposed strategies to address these issues and delve deeply into the potential recommendations. Copies of the PowerPoint presentations for each workshop were posted on the Village website. The invitations to workshops were distributed in Spanish as well as English.



#### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

PPSA then drafted recommendations which were reviewed and revised by the Committee. Then on **June 4th and 11th of 2007**, PPSA presented the resulting joint recommendations at two **community workshops**. The Planning Department provided copies of the recommendations at each workshop and posted the recommendations and PowerPoint presentations on the Village website. A **public comment period** for approximately one month followed these recommendations' workshops.

### What are the Plan's objectives?

#### WATERFRONT OBJECTIVES:

- Maximize public enjoyment of the waterfront
- Make Ossining a destination for low-impact boating and other water-oriented uses
- Provide amenities, services and attractions that will draw people to the waterfront
- Ensure environmentally smart development
- Preserve public views of the Hudson River and Palisades
- Preserve the historical architectural features in the area
- Improve circulation to and through the waterfront area
- Rewrite the zoning for the waterfront area

#### DOWNTOWN OBJECTIVES:

- Promote Ossining as a desirable place to do business, focusing on regulatory reform and capacity building
- Create a unique dining and shopping destination to attract residents and visitors, both during the day and at night
- Promote and enhance downtown amenities and character
- Address perceived and actual parking problems
- Promote economic development outside the Crescent area
- Update existing business district zoning by creating new zones

#### TRANSPORTATION OBJECTIVES:

- Improve traffic conditions throughout the Village, particularly on Route 9
- Enhance walkability throughout the Village
- Improve mass transit options

#### INFRASTRUCTURE OBJECTIVES:

- Maintain quality and expand capacity of the Village's water system
- Improve stormwater management

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING OBJECTIVES:

- Preserve and upgrade existing housing
- Create new affordable housing
- Provide for the administration of affordable units
- Create an affordable housing fund
- Be strategic vis-à-vis regional affordable housing needs and support

#### QUALITY OF LIFE OBJECTIVES:

- Protect the Village's valuable historic resources
- Preserve the unique qualities of Ossining's neighborhoods
- Protect Ossining's existing parks and open space, and plan for more
- Make Ossining more "green"
- Alleviate Ossining's residential overcrowding problems
- Address inadequacies in the current zoning